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Central

ASIA



A Challenge to

KNOW MORE

and DO MORE

CENTRAL ASIA

The average person has but a nodding acquaintance with Central Asia. Vaguely he connects it with romantic names such as Jenghiz Khan or Marco Polo. He may think of it in terms of Tibet or Afghanistan. He may attempt to fit the Mongols into his mental picture, possibly with the Gobi Desert or the Himalayas somewhere in the background. It behoves the Christian, however, to be more informed concerning so great an area and squarely to face its missionary challenge.

To learn more of it, then, let us consider

1) *The Geography of Central Asia.*

Going eastward from the shores of the Caspian it may be said to include the five Soviet Socialistic Republics which make up Russian Turkestan, Afghanistan, India's North West Frontier Province, Baluchistan, Kashmir State, Chinese Turkestan (or Sinkiang), Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, the Chinese provinces of Sikang, Tsinghai and part of Kansu, Southern Siberia, Outer and Inner Mongolia. The population of these countries totals between forty and fifty million. They spread themselves over an area approximately 3500 miles long by 2000 broad, which comprises extensive deserts, such as the Gobi, interspersed with stretches of steppe and backboned by lengthy, massive mountain ranges such as the Himalayas and the Tien Shan whose lofty peaks are capped with eternal snow. Its rivers are mostly of inland drain-

CLOSED LANDS of CENTRAL ASIA

- 1-RUSSIAN TURKESTAN 2-AFGHANISTAN
3-CHINESE TURKESTAN [or SINKIANG] 4-TIBET
5-NEPAL 6-BHUTAN 7-OUTER MONGOLIA



age ending in marsh or salt lake. Its fertile areas are comparatively few but very fruitful. It experiences extremes of heat and cold and indulges often in sandstorms or blizzards according to the season. Its atmosphere is dry and its skies mostly clear. Modes of travel include horse-back, camel caravan, yak, wagon, sleigh, automobile and truck. Wheat, rice,

mutton, milk products and a variety of fruits are among its staple foodstuffs.

2) *The Peoples of Central Asia.*

Central Asia was the cradle of the Aryan race. From it erupted the Huns and the Turks. Today it is still a veritable mixing-pot of peoples, having about a dozen distinct groups

and as many languages. There are the Turki (Uzbeks etc.), the Tajiks, Kazaks, Kirghiz, Pathans, Kashmiris, Tibetans, Nepalese, Mongols (Kalmucks, Buriats etc.), Tungans, Chinese and Russians. Many of these are cattle-raising nomads. Farming, trading and hunting are other common occupations. Most groups show at least a veneer of culture and there is an appreciable hang-over from the flourishing of art and literature some centuries ago. On the whole, however, the standard of living is low.

3) *The Religions of Central Asia.*

Islam has by far the most adherents. Afghanistan, North West India, Russian and Chinese Turkestan are almost wholly Mohammedan. Buddhism claims nearly all the rest, especially the Mongols and Tibetans. There are some animists. Among the Russians there are numbers of evangelical Christians.

4) *The Politics of Central Asia.*

Central Asia is loaded with political dynamite. It is likely to have a great influence on world history, even as it has had in the more remote past. Its strategic position, important trade routes, conglomeration of races, and natural resources all contribute to its political significance. Russia is undoubtedly the dominant force, with China playing an increasingly important role. Chinese Turkestan is the focal point of Chinese-Soviet relations. Japan's occupation of part of Inner Mongolia has brought her into the Central Asian melee. Britain has strong interests on the Indian side

and even the United States now has a consulate in Urumchi, capital of Chinese Turkestan, and also a representative in Kabul, Afghanistan. Watch Central Asia! Watch and pray.

5) *The Missionary Situation.*

The outstanding fact in this connection is that most of Central Asia is closed to the Gospel. At least six of its territories have the "Keep Out" sign marked plainly on their gates. See the accompanying map. Russian domination or influence accounts for the closing of Russian Turkestan, Siberia, Outer Mongolia and even Chinese Turkestan, which province of China, also called Sinkiang, Russia virtually controlled for several years up to about 1942. During that period missionary work was brought to a complete standstill, all the missionaries (members of the Swedish Mission and the China Inland Mission) being eventually forced out.

Religious-political fanaticisms and fears keep Afghanistan, Tibet and Nepal barred to missionary occupation. But Christian forces are operating on the Indian and Chinese borders of these dark lands. Medical missionary work is being carried on with telling effect. The printed messenger is steadily infiltrating. Inner Mongolia has had its witnesses but their work has been disrupted by the war. Russia's reported withdrawal from Sinkiang should mean the reoccupation of that strategic area in the near future. The presence of evangelical Russian Christians there as in Russian Turkestan, Siberia, etc., gives those countries some witnesses, though their activities are no doubt

greatly restricted. The over-all picture thus is one of valiant but quite inadequate forces battling against seemingly impossible odds.

The Missionary Challenge.

The challenge of Central Asia is one of finishing what has been begun—of emulating, indeed, the missionary fervor of the early Christians (Nestorians so-called) who went a long way to evangelizing the heart of Asia—of entering too into the labors of those who in our day are pouring out their lives in this God-given task. There is the urgent call for the reinforcing of the missionary ranks; of preparation for a concerted, planned advance by forces specially trained and equipped, ready to penetrate whenever and wherever possible. More languages must be learned and more translations made of the Scriptures.

Great difficulties confront the missionary enterprise in Central Asia—(1) Suspicions are easily aroused and obstacles set up because of racial-religious animosities and conflicting political interests. (2) Many and diverse languages. (3) Isolation due to the great distances and poor communications. (4) Hardships and risks because of the difficulty often of procuring proper medical attention, suitable foodstuffs or manufactured goods. (5) Physical strain due to living and traveling at high altitudes and in extremes of climate.

The need for believing prayer is immeasurable. Everything depends on it. Opposition will be fierce; the fight will be long. The way must be prepared by a barrage of intelligent, sustained intercession put up by those on the

home front. They must know more and pray more for Central Asia. Its evangelization is no mean task, but we cannot neglect it and be true to our commission. By using every modern facility and following Scriptural methods, with much prayer and simple faith, nothing can stop us! For Christ is as deeply concerned over the evangelization of Central Asia as of any and every part of the world. He waits only for our obedience and co-operation.

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